

“Your Inner Zoo”

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Foxes and hens and chicks, oh my! In the same sentence, that sounds like a recipe for disaster. But in the same story, it's how Jesus uses animal imagery to describe his emotions during his confrontation with the Pharisees.

Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem where he will complete his ministry. His journey began back in 9:51, which reads, “As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem,” and his journey will go all the way through to 19:28, which reads, “After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.”

This is part of Luke's Gospel referred to as the “Journey Narrative.” On this journey, Jesus knows his death is part of the completion of his ministry, it has nothing to do with Herod, so he replies to the Pharisees: “Tell that fox I'm throwing out demons and healing people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will complete my work.” In other words, Jesus is saying, “Tell that fox that God is at work and in control.”

In reflecting and lamenting on Jerusalem, and in contrast to a fox—who loves a good chicken dinner—Jesus describes his love for Jerusalem as his longing to have gathered her people just as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings. I tried to imagine peeking out from underneath warm and fluffy protection. I think I'd like that . . .

But not Jerusalem.

This place kills the protective chickens—the ones who speak and act on behalf of the Divine. As the Holy City and home to the temple where sacrificial rituals were conducted according to Torah law, Jerusalem had an enormous shadow side—Jerusalem had killed the prophets Uriah, Zechariah, and had tried to kill Jeremiah. This City of God will eventually kill Jesus too.

Foxes and hens and chicks, oh my.

In continuing with the idea of giving up parts of your shadow self for Lent, your hidden, repressed and denied parts of your self—what in you is like a fox, and what in you is like a hen and a chick? Remember, in our shadows, we don't only deny what we don't like about ourselves, but we might also deny some good qualities as well.

Jesus knew a fox could be sly and tricky and predatory. He knew that about Herod as well. What comes to mind for you when you think of a fox? What is their “reputation?” Or what is your experience and understanding of them?

Jesus knew that hens could be fiercely protective and would give up their lives protecting their brood. He knew that about himself as well. So what about hens and chicks for you? What do they bring to mind?

In any of those qualities described, do you deny any of those things in yourself by finding them terrible or wonderful in another? Remember, when we have a strong emotional response to someone else's personality, it is likely because we have not made peace with that part of our own selves.

Our movement across Lent asks us to walk in and with our shadows, as we do our own internal search for the things that keep us from knowing or understanding our connection to everything and everyone. We are separated when we deny or hide parts of ourselves. God made the whole of us, not just our favorite parts. So, Lent invites us to struggle with our separation from the Divine.

Here in my home office, I am collecting images of animals that help me work with aspects of my shadow. My favorite image so far is this print of an octopus. Octopus are many things, but for my shadow work, I especially notice their resourcefulness, smarts, and clingy-ness. I have come to accept those things about myself as well. Remember last week I shared that we can repress or deny things about ourselves that are good and needed, like resourcefulness and smarts. And our shadows also hold our challenging bits as well. I can be very clingy—not my favorite quality in me, by a long shot, but there it is.

As we continue through Lent, I invite you to begin a collection of animal images. You can cut them out from magazines or download images from the web, or if some sentient being especially speaks to you, maybe you want to get fancy like I did with my octopus. Whatever you do, think about the parts of yourself that you keep at bay, or maybe you get a little touchy about if someone points these things out in you.

See if there are some animals out there in the world with whom you can identify. Walk with the images across Lent and see what they can show you.

Amen.